

❖ In many instances, it is not possible for couples to become a single church, single faith couple. However, whenever it is possible, couples should prayerfully consider this option. Such a decision often has a positive impact on marital and family religious and spiritual development.

❖ If you are unable to resolve conflict related to your religious differences, consider getting outside help. Permitting conflicts to linger will be detrimental to your marital and family well-being. Consider consulting your pastor when you begin your search. Pastoral counseling or a referral to a competent professional can be very helpful.

Some Concluding Remarks

From time to time I have received these types of E-mails. Some of them have come from newlyweds and others from spouses who were at a different point in the marital life cycle. In all cases, respondents were searching for some useful advice and strategies that might help them neutralize conflicts related to their religious and cultural differences.

Whether or not the contents of this article apply directly to you, I believe this information will be of value since all intermarried couples are potentially at risk of encountering these challenges. By familiarizing yourselves with these suggested

strategies you can enhance marital and family well-being.

For more information please consult the Interfaith Marriage Web site at www.interfaith.goarch.org. When You Intermarry and Attending to Your Marriage are both equally helpful resources.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

INTERFAITH WEB SITE
www.Interfaith.goarch.org

Center for Family Care
www.family.goarch.org

OUTREACH & EVANGELISM WEB SITE
www.Outreach.goarch.org

PUBLICATIONS

By Charles Joanides Ph.D., LMFT
When You Intermarry
Ministering to Intermarried Couples
Attending to Your Marriage



Marriage and Family

Some Practical Steps
Department of Marriage and Family



Produced by the Department of
Marriage and Family
Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America

Avoid Arguments Related to Your Religious Differences: Ten Strategies

*Rev. Fr. Charles Joanides,
Ph.D., LMFT*

"Dear Fr. Charles,

I'm a practicing Orthodox Christian who recently married a non-denominational Christian. We married a little over a month ago. Before getting married we had many discussions. At this point, things are beginning to unravel religiously. Issues I thought were resolved have become big problems....Anytime we try to discuss our religions we both become very defensive. I have tried to be less defensive, but I feel I am on trail every time the subject of religion comes up. Do you have any advice for me as a newlywed?"

E-mail Respondent



When Couples Get Locked in a War of Words

What often begins as a harmless exchange between spouses over their ethnic and religious differences can quickly escalate into a serious argument that is characterized by lots of destructive criticism, contempt, and perhaps even defensiveness. Theological religious differences are the "real topic," however, rather than talking about God and theology, some couples rapidly

lose focus. Their exchanges disparage and attack one another's religious core values, their family background and even their traditions.

If these personal, hurtful attacks continue unabated, increased anger, resentment and emotional distancing is the result.

Unresolved, unabated attacks undermine religious, spiritual and emotional oneness and connection. Unless couples can find ways to neutralize the residual effects of these destructive exchanges — while also avoiding similar future exchanges — marital and family stability will suffer. That being the case, the following ten suggested strategies can potentially help couples not only avoid these arguments but also neutralize their toxic effects.

Ten Strategies that Can Help

❖ Many engaged couples with different ethnic and religious backgrounds fail to talk about these differences before marriage. They usually underestimate the importance of talking about these differences before marriage. That can be a mistake. This is especially true of two partners who have high connections to their religious backgrounds. Couples, who do talk about their differences, often fail to spend enough quality time examining them. Some may be intimidated by in-depth conversations, avoiding the obvious differences simply because they don't want to upset one another. Others might not be fully aware of the potential challenges, and by

extension, the important questions they should be seriously discussing. To assist dating and engaged couples with this challenge, the Interfaith Marriage Web site contains two useful questionnaires: one for inter-Christian, intercultural couples and another for couples considering an interreligious marriage.

- ❖ After marriage, try to avoid making your religious differences the central topic of your discussions whenever the topic of religion comes up. Instead, focus on the commonalities your religious traditions share with one another. The common ground between the two of you will permit blessed discussion of the type that can serve to facilitate connection and holiness in your marriage, home and family.
- ❖ When it comes to social issues and subjects of a religious nature, there is a wide array of perspectives and doctrinal positions. Some typical social issues where differences exist between faith groups are as follows: same sex marriage, homosexuality and abortion. Other less incendiary, but equally important issues might be topics such as married priests, women's ordination, baptism and the sacraments. As a result, when you do discuss these and other similar potentially hot-button topics, and you discover differences, make sure to frame the conversations in a way that will permit the two of you to respect and learn from one another's faith background while also not allowing these differences

to be a divisive influence in your marriage.

- ❖ When you discuss your differences, think of these conversations as opportunities for the two of you to grow in knowledge about your own personal faith tradition as well as your partner's faith tradition.
- ❖ When your traditions do not agree, prayerfully and respectfully agree to disagree.
- ❖ Remember that God does not want your religious differences to undermine marital oneness and the blessed connection you share with one another.
- ❖ Remember that if you both have a high connection to your religious traditions, there is a higher probability that you will encounter more challenges. Those in this category should be especially aware of how their differences can undermine religious and spiritual development as well as family stability.
- ❖ Remember that couples who respond to their differences in a Christ-centered manner — where respect and prayer provide balance and guidance — grow closer to one another and report that their lives have been enriched. Conversely, couples who view their differences as inherent deficits and react with criticism, contempt and defensiveness soon find themselves embroiled in destructive arguments that undermine oneness and connection.